

House VA-HUD Appropriations Committee
Oral Testimony by David Eisner
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March 24, 2004
As Delivered, Unofficial Transcript

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the Administration's fiscal year 2005 budget request for the programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service funded by this Committee.

I want to start by expressing my deep and sincere gratitude to the Chairman and members of this Committee for your hard work and support for the Corporation's programs during the 2004 budget process. Your efforts enable us to support a record 75,000 members, which is very good news not only to communities and service organizations nationwide, but to thousands of Americans who want to give back to their country and expand their horizons, by serving. The 2004 budget also will allow us to engage .8 million students in service to their communities through service-learning programs supported by Learn and Serve America.

As you know, last year's hearing came in the midst of a very tumultuous year for the Corporation. Twelve months later, I am pleased to report that the Corporation is in a far stronger position, due in large part to your leadership, due to internal reforms at the Corporation, and of course passage of the Strengthen AmeriCorps Program Act, which set into law the methods of accounting for obligations in the National Service Trust. Of course, our stronger position is also due in no small part to a truly amazing field of grantees, a dedicated and talented team at the Corporation, and the inspiring energy and passion of our members and participants, young and old, across the country.

When I began as CEO of the Corporation in December, I articulated three goals to guide the way the Corporation goes about its business.

- First, restoring trust and credibility with all of our stakeholders. The three core stakeholders are Congress, our grantees and our employees.
- Second, managing to accountability; and
- And third, focusing on the needs of our customers.

These principles I believe reinforced and accelerated a number of operational and other reforms that were already under way when I arrived at the Corporation, and have led to substantial improvements, including a comprehensive new set of policies and procedures for awarding grants and enrolling AmeriCorps members in the National Service Trust to ensure that the problems of the past year are never repeated.

To continue this progress, the President's 2005 budget includes several small, targeted investments in programs and initiatives that are designed to find effective ways to use our programs to leverage the number of volunteers engaged in service, increase outreach to new groups, leverage private dollars, and ensure that the Corporation can provide our grantees with effective assistance and monitoring.

In addition, two recent developments – an Executive Order on National and Community Service, which President Bush signed last month, and the beginning of the AmeriCorps rulemaking process on such issues as sustainability of grantees and federal share of program costs – promise to accelerate the reform process.

In an effort to meet with the Corporation's stakeholders and hear their opinions, we have scheduled five community meetings on rulemaking across the country. In the last few weeks, I have traveled to Columbus, Ohio, and Seattle, and I can tell you that our grantees, members, state commissions, and other partners all have legitimate and varied points of view

about the future of the program. However, these stakeholders also have a wealth of experience, knowledge, and new ideas that we must harness to make the AmeriCorps program more efficient, effective, and accountable, and to make AmeriCorps requirements more predictable and consistent for applicants and grantees.

As we bring reform to our programs, the Corporation is striving to ensure that national service works intentionally to broaden, deepen, and strengthen the ability of our nation's 63 million traditional volunteers to contribute – and of America's communities to capture this strength. One important role, as noted in the Executive Order, is to serve as an engine of volunteer mobilization. In addition, we are also helping to build the capacity of nonprofit groups, both faith-based and secular, so that they can increase their reach and become self-sustaining.

This does not preclude national service participants from continuing to provide direct service. But it stresses those areas where we can add value to the volunteer world. Of course, doing good is not enough. We must also be strategic, demonstrate our results, and adhere to the soundest principles of financial and organizational excellence.

As I said, I am pleased to report that today a new level of fiscal and organizational integrity marks the way the Corporation conducts its business. Through continued management reforms and the targeted investments we are requesting in the 2005 budget, we are confident we can move even closer to realizing our goals.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement.